

****ATTENTION****

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FORTY PHEASANT FACTS

1. HOW MANY PHEASANTS ARE THERE IN WASHINGTON?

The number varies. It is lowest just before hatching and at its high after the chicks are hatched. There are about two million pheasants in the state at the beginning of an average hunting season, during which about 300,000 roosters are taken.

2. HOW MANY PEOPLE HUNT PHEASANTS IN WASHINGTON?

About 50,000 people hunt pheasants each year.

3. WHEN DID WASHINGTON FIRST ALLOW HUNTING OF PHEASANTS?

Records show Washington's first pheasant season took place in 1897.

4. WERE PHEASANTS FOUND IN WASHINGTON WHEN IT WAS FIRST SETTLED?

No. Pheasants are not native to any part of the United States. The first introduction in the United States was in 1881 when birds were successfully introduced in Oregon. Washington received some of this stock in 1883. Heavy plants were made west of the Cascades in 1893 and in eastern Washington in 1898.

5. WHERE ARE PHEASANTS FOUND IN WASHINGTON?

Pheasants are found in and near most agricultural areas of the state. The grain producing areas of eastern Washington provide the best pheasant habitat and the highest pheasant populations.

6. ARE PHEASANTS INCREASING IN WASHINGTON?

In all areas of the state suitable for pheasants, the birds are present, and at carrying capacity. The carrying capacity of any area varies throughout the year, and from one year to the next, but natural factors of a pheasant population operate to keep the habitat constantly full.

7. WHY, THEN, DO WE HAVE SO MANY PHEASANTS AS A RESULT OF THE FEW BIRDS PLANTED BACK IN THE 1890s?

Pheasants, like other birds, increase rapidly when there is good habitat. This was the case in the 1890s. Once the habitat is filled with all the birds it can hold, it puts a ceiling on this increase. Biologists call this "reaching carrying capacity". Newly created habitat results in an increase in birds until this carrying capacity is reached and then the population levels off.

8. HOW LONG DOES A WILD PHEASANT LIVE?

Less than five percent of the chicks hatched this year will still be alive next year. Pheasants - like other animals with high birth rates have a high death rate. In other words, they must die at the same rate they are being hatched; they cannot be stockpiled.

9. WHY ARE THERE MORE BIRDS IN SOME AREAS THAN IN OTHERS?

Areas of good soil and diversified

agriculture are best for pheasants. The Columbia Basin and the Yakima Valley are such areas, and, as a result, among the better pheasant producers. Other places can be rated according to soil fertility and habitat patterns. The good ones produce lots of birds and the poor areas of large acreages of one agricultural (habitat) type support few birds.

10. WHAT IS THE WEIGHT OF A PHEASANT?

The weight of a healthy adult rooster averages three pounds and a hen about two and one-half pounds.

11. WHAT DO PHEASANTS EAT?

For about the first five weeks of their lives, pheasants feed almost entirely on insects. As they get older, they switch to weed seeds, grasses, and grain. The most important pheasant food is cereal grain, with wheat and corn making up the bulk. Other plants, though eaten, are less important and may have poor nutritive value to pheasants.

12. DOES IT HURT PHEASANTS TO GO THROUGH PERIODS OF FOOD SHORTAGE?

Not directly, if the shortage is less than four to six weeks in duration. However, hens in poor physical condition normally produce fewer or less hardy chicks.

13. DO PHEASANTS SUFFER MANY DISEASES?

Not normally. Disease thrives under



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crowded conditions. Natural factors prevent crowding, so wild pheasants are seldom affected.

14. DO AGRICULTURAL SPRAYS AFFECT PHEASANTS?

Some sprays are known to kill pheasants, especially young birds. Death is caused either by direct contact or by feeding on spray-killed insects. Weed killers cause considerable damage when food and cover are destroyed, thereby lowering carrying capacity of the land. Many agencies are trying to determine how sprays affect wildlife.

15. HOW FAR DO PHEASANTS TRAVEL?

Pheasants usually spend their entire lives in about a square mile area. There are rare exceptions where pheasants have been known to travel up to 20 or 30 miles. Whenever they move any distance, they are exposed to danger. That is why it is important for food, cover, and water to be near each other.

16. HOW MANY EGGS WILL A PHEASANT LAY A YEAR?

Although the average nest contains about a dozen, the hen usually lays about 30 eggs starting in late March. Several eggs are laid before attempts are made at nesting. Early nests are often abandoned before the hen settles down to incubating the eggs and bringing off a brood.

17. WILL A HEN PHEASANT RE-NEST IF HER EARLY NEST IS DESTROYED OR ABANDONED?

If a hen's first nest is broken up early in the season, she will re-nest. A hen may thus make repeated attempts to produce one brood of chicks.

18. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE A HEN PHEASANT TO BRING OFF A BROOD?

About 39 days. This includes 14 or 15 days to lay an average size clutch and 23 or 24 days to hatch the eggs. Most chicks hatch during the first two weeks in June.

19. HOW MANY BROODS WILL A HEN HAVE DURING A YEAR?

Just one; there are no authentic records of a hen bringing off more. Hens are often seen with chicks of different sizes, which may lead one to believe that a single hen has hatched two clutches. This impression, however, is gained because chicks scatter and wander from their mother and end up with another hen. It is not too unusual to see a hen with as many as 20 chicks of various ages.

20. DO WE HAVE ENOUGH COCKS IN THE SPRING TO ASSURE TOP PRODUCTION? WHAT ABOUT INFERTILE EGGS?

Cocks mate with more than one hen - they do not pair off. Counts made before nesting season usually show there is one cock for three hens. Experiments have shown that one cock to 15 hens is adequate for breeding purposes. There are few records of infertile eggs.

21. WHY ARE SOME HENS SEEN LATE IN THE SUMMER WITHOUT CHICKS?

Young pheasants are very susceptible to the many dangers of the wild. Large broods are necessary to make up for those which will be lost. If 50 percent of the hens can raise half of the young in their broods, we will have a good hunting season.

22. WHY DO COCK PHEASANTS SEEM TO DISAPPEAR IN LATE SPRING?

At the peak of breeding activity during early spring, cocks are very bold and easily seen. In late spring, they molt and become much more shy. Young pheasants are not readily seen until after crop harvests begin in July. Most of the year, the best time to see pheasants is early morning and in the evening.

23. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF COCKS KILLED IN THE FALL ARE BIRDS HATCHED THE SAME YEAR?

There is some variation, but generally eight or nine young birds are killed for each old one. There are more young than old birds available during hunting season. Pheasants have a short life span, meaning that few will live until a second hunting season.

24. HOW CAN YOU KNOW WHETHER A ROOSTER IS YOUNG OR OLD?

Hold the dead bird up by the lower bill. If the bill will support the pheasant's weight, it is more than one year old. If the bill bends or breaks, it is a young bird hatched that year.

25. WOULD CLOSING THE SEASON FOR A YEAR OR TWO INCREASE THE PHEASANT POPULATION?

Definitely not! We have learned that our broodstock is about the same each spring no matter how many were around in the fall. Closing the seasons would only mean more birds lost because of over-crowding the habitat - remember carrying capacity? A lot of recreation would be sacrificed and no real good accomplished by closing the season.

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26. WHY NOT ESTABLISH REFUGES FOR PHEASANTS?

Again, think of carrying capacity. Once the birds build up to what the refuge can hold, it would be no different than any other area. Besides, it would only act as another "posted" area for roosters to escape into until the hunting season is over.

27. DO PREDATORS AFFECT PHEASANT POPULATIONS?

In any area, predators kill some of the pheasants. These birds, however, are the surplus - those produced in excess of the carrying capacity. Quality of the habitat controls the effectiveness of predators. Thus, carrying capacity, rather than predation, is the key to population size.

28. HOW ABOUT A SIMPLE DEFINITION OF CARRYING CAPACITY?

Think of carrying capacity as a bucket, and pheasants as water in this bucket. A bucket can only hold so much water - the land can hold only so many birds. If you pour more water in, it will spill out and be lost - if more birds are produced or try to use the land, they, too, will be lost.

29. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO INCREASE PHEASANT POPULATIONS?

Pheasants are a crop - like wheat, beans, corn, or cattle. Like other crops, they need fertile soil; and they increase with good land management. This management includes providing the right amounts of cover, food, and water near each other. Extra movement increases mortality. Anything done to limit the need for travel from food to cover or water, increases survival.

30. WHY ARE THERE MORE BIRDS TO HUNT IN SOME YEAR THAN IN OTHERS?

The number of pheasants hatched and successfully reared in a given year determines the number we will have during that year's hunting season. The direct and indirect effects of weather seem to be the most important influences on the number of hens with broods. Combinations of cold, wet, and windy weather hurt newly-hatched birds and result in fewer chicks per brood. Abrupt changes from early mild weather to periods of cold later, affect hen laying and setting instincts. These same factors affect insect life and plant growth - important in the amount and quality of habitat. These complex variations from one year to another influence numbers available during different hunting seasons.

31. CAN WE SHOOT TOO MANY PHEASANTS IN SOME AREAS?

In some cases, cocks can be overharvested in a particular area. But because the ringneck has such a high rate of reproduction, the birds build back up by next hunting season. There are always pheasants in nearby areas available to fill in areas of low abundance.

32. HOW IS THE HUNTING SEASON PHEASANT POPULATION PREDICTED?

Every year counts are made. These counts provide population change and other data. They tell us how the bird crop is doing. Care is taken to get this information in the same way and same place, so the data are comparable.

33. HOW MANY PHEASANT FARMS ARE THERE IN WASHINGTON AND HOW MANY BIRDS ARE RAISED EACH YEAR?

There are two farms, operated by the Department of Wildlife. From 35,000 to 40,000 pheasants are raised each year.

34. HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO RAISE A PHEASANT ON A GAME FARM?

It costs about \$10.00 to raise each bird. Costs of birds actually taken by hunters is much greater and varies with the time of release.

35. WHY DO STATE GAME FARMS RAISE ONLY THE RING-NECKED PHEASANT?

Of all the varieties of pheasants tried and released, this bird has proven most adaptable to Washington's habitat and gun pressure. Golden, silver, copper, black-necked, Reeves and Amherst pheasants, as well as other varieties, have been tried; but the old reliable ringneck has proven to be the better bird. Species introduced include the chukar, red-legged and Hungarian partridge, bob-white, and California valley quail.

36. WHEN ARE PHEASANTS PLANTED?

Most plants are made just before and during the hunting season.

37. WHAT IS THE HARVEST RATE OF STOCKED BIRDS?

Band returns show that the shorter the time between release and hunting season, the greater the returns will be. Some "under-the-gun" plants on state-owned ranges show a 70 percent return.

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38. WHY NOT PLANT PHEASANTS IN AREAS THAT NOW HAVE NO BIRDS?

All areas suitable for pheasants do have birds. Areas without birds are unsuitable. Many birds would not survive to reproduce themselves in these instances.

39. HOW AND BY WHOM ARE PLANTING SITES SELECTED?

Planting sites are selected on the basis of cover and availability of the land to hunters. It is against the policy of the Department of Wildlife to plant birds on lands posted against hunting.

40. HOW CAN HUNTERS HELP TO IMPROVE PHEASANT HUNTING?

The most important aspect of improving pheasant populations is habitat enhancement and protection. All hunters should support programs designed to promote habitat. Be a sportsman and respect the property where you hunt. No matter how many birds we have, your hunting success depends on having a place to hunt. In Washington, most pheasants are produced on private land so our behavior as hunters is very important in keeping this land open to hunting. Most farmers want to know who is on their land - so ask before you hunt, respect all signs and conduct yourself as a guest because that is what you are.

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